Customize appearance

Tori Amos Says Eminem's Fictional Dead Wife Spoke To Her

Rapper's "97 Bonnie & Clyde' is one of a dozen songs given new sound, new perspective on Strange Little Girls.

By archive-Teri-vanHorn

By archive-Teri-vanHorn

September 28, 2001 / 9:18 PM

A decade ago, Tori Amos made a musical breakthrough with an autobiographical tale of rape called "Me and a Gun." On her new album, *Strange Little Girls,* she again addresses the subject of female victimization — this time by turning Eminem's fantasy about killing his wife inside-out.

She does so without changing the lyrics to "'97 Bonnie & Clyde," but by adopting the voice of his dead wife in the trunk of the car, just before her body is thrown in Lake Michigan.

"'Bonnie & Clyde' is a song that depicts domestic violence very accurately, right on the money," Amos said. "I did not align with the character that he represents. There was one person who definitely wasn't dancing to this thing, and that's the woman in the trunk. And she spoke to me. ... [She] grabbed me by the hand and said, 'You need to hear this how I heard it.'"

For *Strange Little Girls,* released last month, Amos takes 12 songs written by men and gives them each a distinctive, female voice. Her choices also include the Velvet Underground's "New Age," Tom Waits' "Time," the Beatles' "Happiness Is a Warm Gun," Slayer's "Raining Blood" and Depeche Mode's "Enjoy the Silence."

"Music is always a reflection of what's going on in the hearts and minds of the culture," Amos said. "If you're singing songs that are about cutting women up, usually these guys are tapping into an unconscious male rage that is real, that's existing — they're just able to harness it. So to shut them up isn't the answer. They're a gauge; they're showing you what's really happening in the psyche of a lot of people."

"I made an album that's a commentary on our time, and unfortunately it's on target," she said.

Shortly after giving birth to her first child, Amos was in the midst of writing an album of new material when she came up with the idea for the covers album.

"I wanted to do something creatively, having been a beached whale for many months and nursing my daughter," she said. "And it just started to say to me, you wanna create something, you're drawn to the idea of a world where the men are the mothers, and you've been both a song mother and a human mother and they're very similar. ... And that was one of the first light bulbs that flashed — a place where the men are the mothers. ... You take a man's word, you take his seed. So let's take his seed, let's plant it here, consummation. Man's seed, woman's voice."

While Amos said she knew almost immediately what perspective she would take for "'97 Bonnie & Clyde," finding the right voice for other songs wasn't as easy. For the Beatles' "Happiness Is a Warm Gun," Amos researched John Lennon's death and discovered that Mark David Chapman had called an escort service before he shot Lennon.

"The service that he asked her to do [was] to be silent," she said. "So silent all these years, which is a reference to my life, I was able to hold that frequency, through the silence, through the silencer."

Amos said she identifies most with the voice for Lloyd Cole and the Commotions' "Rattlesnakes," which features the lyrics "Jodie wears a hat although it hasn't rained for six days/ She says a girl needs a gun these days/ Hey, on account of all the rattlesnakes."

"It wasn't part of my life when it came out, and it's become this little song that was able to look into a woman and how she thinks and feels better than how I've been able to look into women sometimes," she said. "That song just seems to understand the things that hide here."

While Amos has covered everyone from Leonard Cohen to Led Zeppelin during the course of her career, she said her take on Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" gave her the best dress rehearsal for *Strange Little Girls.* "The perspective I took at the time was male rage," she said. "I went after the anima in the song itself, so it was similar [to my approach on this album.]"

The singer, who kicks off her tour in Florida this weekend, said making *Girls* translate live is a tricky task. Every night features a different mix of excerpts from the album and her 10 years of catalog material.

"It's fun to write your set list 20 minutes before and keep the crew very much on their toes," she said. "We really don't know what the show's going to be that night. I sneak around behind curtains and get a vibe of the audience and the city I'm in."